Installation Plaques

Thermal Imaging Display

As you step into this opening part of the exhibit, a live thermal camera displays the heat signatures of you and the bodies around you. This is meant to capture the shared warmth of humans. Although each individual is unique, our bodies emit a similar heat signature, symbolizing a fundamental connection beneath our skin. These live thermal images invite you to consider the ways we view, judge, and read bodies at a surface level while overlooking what lies within.

Moving further into the exhibit, you will encounter a recorded thermal video of people receiving tattoos in different environments (cold versus warm rooms). In this video, the surface of the skin and the tattoo itself appear in shades of temperature, highlighting the physicality of tattooing as an embodied act. The difference in environment also has an effect on the ways the body and tattoo inks are presented. Observe the differences. This visual juxtaposition between warmth and skin serves as a reminder of the ways in which tattoos transcend the visible, becoming personal, cultural, and emotional symbols that persist beneath the surface. In fact, you can barely see the tattoos that are being marked on these bodies. Thereby emphasizing our point that tattoos are more than visible marks—they connect histories, memories, and cultural identities with the body, etched through a process that engages deeply with sensation, skin, and temperature. As you continue through the exhibit, keep in mind how each experience adds to the layered meanings tattooed bodies carry.

Tattoo Soundscape + Other Senses

Step into the sensory world of tattooing as you walk through this dimly lit path, guided by soft floor lights and a spongy floor that echoes the resilience of skin. In this immersive experience, the familiar sounds of tattooing surround you: the distinct and piercing buzz of the tattoo machine, the crisp sound of tattoo needles being unwrapped, the soothing sounds of ripping pieces of saran wrap and paper towels, the quiet pouring of ink, the swish of water, and the gentle hum of voices and music in the background. Each sound captures a piece of the tattooing process, making this journey one that envelops you in the craft's auditory landscape.

As you continue, you'll notice scents filling the air: green soap, the sharp hint of alcohol, and the earthy smell of ink. Each scent transports you to a tattoo studio, evoking the anticipation and preparation that come with each tattooing session. Tattooing is a deeply sensory experience, one that combines touch, sound, sight, and smell to boost the memory that is being permanently etched on the skin. This pathway immerses you in the layered sensory world of tattoos, inviting you to feel the process behind

each tattoo and imagine how these marks connect to personal and collective stories of identity, resilience, and cultural expression.

Tattoo Photograph Gallery

This gallery presents a vivid journey through tattoo art from cultures and people worldwide. Here, photographs of tattoos from diverse backgrounds, techniques, and traditions are displayed without categorization, allowing you to experience the vast array of stories and meanings that tattooing holds across different identities without cultural biases or hierarchies. The randomness of the display mirrors the organic and personal nature of tattooing—each image reveals a unique story, each person a canvas where memories, beliefs, and histories converge.

Each set of images includes close-up details of the tattoos, broader portraits of the tattooed individuals taken by their own direction, and other related visuals. The images provide a holistic view of each tattoo and its wearer, and are organized by the wearer's preference. Accompanying these photos are oral histories recorded by those featured, offering visitors a chance to listen to the personal narratives behind each tattoo. Each oral history is different, from the stories they tell to the way these stories are displayed: some are just audio recordings, others are video and audio recorded. These voices share stories of love, loss, resilience, family, and identity, making visible the ways tattoos act as embodied memories. As you walk through the gallery, consider the significance of these marks beyond their visual appearance—they are legacies written on skin, connecting past, present, and future in a way only tattoos can.

Community Quilt

Conclude your journey by contributing to the community quilt, a collaborative digital artwork where you can share your own stories or connections to tattoos. Regardless of whether you have tattoos, you're invited to reflect on what tattoos mean to you in terms of memory, identity, and belonging. Using a provided tablet, create a panel that reflects your personal narrative or thoughts about tattoos, which will be added to a large digital display alongside others' reflections. Be sure to also observe the other panels.

This collective piece embodies the community aspect of tattooing, where individual stories and experiences come together to form a tapestry of connection and shared identity. As the quilt grows with each addition, it reflects the ongoing impact of tattoos as markers of personal and cultural significance. In this final space, consider how tattoos serve as a bridge between people across

backgrounds, allowing people to find common ground in their experiences, memories, and self-expression. This community quilt symbolizes the enduring power of tattoos to unite, commemorate, and inspire—a living legacy woven together by the stories of those who pass through.